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ABSTRACT

In the rapid process of change within the last decade our schools have taken on a very important, non-traditional, and also highly moral role -- fulfilling as social instruments America's pledge that all citizens have an equal chance for intellectual and material opportunities. Moreover, the schools today are working intensely to shed dehumanizing institutionalism. The social issues of our day rest directly on changeless values represented in Christianity. Values must be transmitted from generation to generation by means of our educational institutions supplementing the example and instruction of the church and family. (Author/VW)

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THE LONG MARCH*

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I have taken the title of these remarks from an article that appeared in the May 6 issue of Saturday Review, a meditation, as the author called it, on the Jesus Movement among young Americans desiring the simple life, some kind of religious solace, and perhaps a justification and absolution for their own lives. The long march referred to is a philosophical journey that these idealistic young people believe that this Nation --- through the instrumentality of their movement --- has barely begun, one that it will take us decades to complete they say. For, as the author notes, "Our 'new' consciousness has not released us from the demons of the age but has simply brought us face to face with them."

The theology of the Jesus Movement is questionable, its durability probably even more so. We may legitimately doubt that many who espouse the cause of the "new" Christianity, who preach the doctrine of "milennialism," will remain true to this particular faith throughout the journey of which they speak. Indeed, Peter Marin, the author of the article, tends to see the whole business as simply the most recent, popular, and self-conscious expression of the need to reduce the "nightmare complexity of things to a manageable form," simply one more addition to the whole hazy landscape of pop theories and enthusiasms.

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Mr. Marin may be is right, to a degree. But I am not so sure that his analysis is not rather an incomplete one. Perhaps, viewed from a higher level of abstraction, the Jesus Movement offers a message of significance for the larger society whose members --- you and I included --- are unlikely to withdraw from the system in favor of their abstract code of neo-beliefs, to become as they are "children of yearning."

By instinct or design or through the agency of some ill defined but innate moral sense, rationally or irrationally, it seems clear enough to me that the Jesus Freaks have turned in the right direction, not so much beginning a bold new journey as they may imagine, but certainly rediscovering for themselves the path taken by the Man whose name and faith they have adopted --- the path of love, concern, and responsibility for others.

In the new and disordered context of their lives, these young people are reasserting a very old and very ordered ethic, a set of moral principles which, at bottom, form the foundation of our civilization and without which our civilization could not endure.

In simplicity and perhaps, as Mr. Marin suggests, a certain amount of misdirection, the Jesus Freaks of our time have stumbled upon the truths of past, present, and future, or at least have become aware of their existence. Despite the unorthodoxy of their creed, I consider it an entirely hopeful phenomenon. In these troubled times orthodoxy cannot be considered the issue, but rather the recognition and observance and implicit acknowledge-

ment of the broad guiding principles --- whatever their derivation --- that make us a civilized people. I am a professing Christian with all that implies, and yet I hold with United States Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson's conviction that the principles of order and guidance in western civilization derive from many sources.

In a decision rendered by the Court in 1948 regarding the teaching of religion in the public schools, Justice Jackson wrote: "Nearly everything in our culture worth transmitting, everything which gives meaning to life, is saturated with the religious influences derived from paganism, Judaism, Christianity --- both Catholic and Protestant --- and other faiths accepted by a large part of the world's peoples."

Humankind did not arrive at a workable system of values without struggle, nor will it preserve those values without further and continuing struggle --- the struggle that your parents have been waging throughout their adult lives, the struggle that you are about to join in full earnest.

As members of the first graduating class of Palm Beach Atlantic College, I believe it is fair to state that you have a special and perhaps heavier burden to bear than the members of your generation who during these weeks will graduate from other institutions of higher education throughout America.

For you are committed to preserving unchanging values in a changing world. You will enter the lists wearing the rings and

carrying the diplomas of an institution that is committed to carry on in its curriculum and practices the Christian principles with which we are all familiar --- and you will carry in your hearts these teachings as well as the virtues and sound practices with which you have been imbued since childhood through the instruction and inspiration of your parents and your associates.

You are asked to remain faithful to a creed in a world in which faithfulness seems not to be important, necessary, or fashionable by large elements of the population. You are asked to resist in certain things the impulses and claims of change at a time in the history of man when change is accorded unquestioning deference by large numbers of the most elite intellectual class, when change is often regarded as a good in itself. You are asked to retain and treasure the great lessons which man has shaped during a long and difficult history, taking instruction from the past at a time when the past itself is in increasing disrepute. None of the great minds of history --- Jefferson, Voltaire, Goethe, Hegel, Darwin, Freud --- could have imagined the statement made recently by one eminent historian in speaking of the "death of the past," which he interprets to mean that the full development of our industrial society not only can be accomplished <u>without</u> any conceptions of the past but, in some instances, would only be limited and obstructed by references to the men and women who have gone before us and by whose cultural and civilizing contributions we have lived.

Apparently we have not only to defend our value system, but history itself against the depredations of such enthusiastically destructive thinkers and writers.

We cannot expect nor desire that time will stand still, the clock stopping at an hour pleasing to us. Alvin Toffler, in Future Shock, discusses the matter of rapid change in our value systems and suggests that this change will continue and will be more than confusing to the vast majority of the present young generation... you. He believes that we are caught in a great upheaval brought on by collisions among our various value systems --- and by the conviction that the future will bring more of the same --- more change, more moral turnover, less and less agreement on common standards of conduct, language, or ethics. The difficulty of predicting further change affects all our lives, as a Nation and as individuals. All we can be sure of is that it is bound to happen --- and all we can do is try to learn, as economist Kenneth Boulding put it, to "plan for surprise." Just as a ship can be tossed up, down, and sideways in heavy seas, yet make steady progress toward its destination because the gyroscope compensates for momentary deviations from course, so a person can cope with rapid change if he holds hard to those enduring principles that he holds closely, and that retain their validity no matter how the world around him pitches.

I am speaking of such Christian principles as brotherhood in its uttermost sense; of the dignity and worth of all human beings; of the infinite spiritual differences that raise man above the

beasts; of the fundamental force of love as the transcending essence of goodness, as distinct from evil. These values were not so recently or so lightly acquired that they lend themselves to bland dismissal through a petition, or a protest or through a resolution adopted by a board of trustees, or a new and temporal law, or even by a decision of a court of justice. These are mere acts of men. The roots of our value system were handed to your antecedents and mine, perhaps on a rugged mountainside in the Middle East, perhaps by the inexorable processes of pre-history and history, perhaps by divine inspiration and sustenance. But they are here, they are real, and they must endure for our sake, the sake of our children, and for the strengthening of the sometimes flickering hopes of mankind in the future of his species.

The social issues of our day --- civil rights, fair housing, concern for the poor, the ill, the aged, solemn student cries for justice, universal literacy, human dignity, racial justice, equality of opportunity --- all of these rest directly on what we must recognize as changeless values, and values that must be transmitted from generation to generation by means of our educational institutions supplementing the example and instruction of the church and family.

This duty of imparting value is one that is shared by all of education --- by the public instituions with which I have been associated throughout all of my professional life, and of course by the private institutions as well, particularly those such as

Palm Beach Atlantic College whose purpose for being is as much derived from moral and spiritual values as from purely educational values --- if indeed education can in any true sense be divorced from morality.

I support with sincerity and enthusiasm the cause of private education in the United States precisely because religious schools and independent schools are free to engage in spiritual instruction as well as in sound secular instruction, thus contributing greatly to the formation and development of the American mind and character. And while there are obvious Constitutional barriers to religious teaching in the public schools, still all educators must acknowledge the part which organized religion has played in establishing the moral and ethical values implicit in the Judeo-Christian ethic that schools must develop and transmit and that educators must if they are true to their profession strive within Constitutional limits to convey to the pupils in their charge.

Certainly educators have long been concerned with defining and implementing the public schools's own ethical imperatives. While their commitment to the processes and goals of education has led them to a sound distaste for indoctrination of any kind, at the same time there is a nearly universal consensus, I would say, that the schools have an important part to play in the building of character and in the development and reinforcement of value systems that are consonant with the values expressed through the larger society.

Few public school officials would dispute the wisdom, even

the sheer necessity for personal fulfillment, of every individual's commitment to something higher than self and more than the passing moment. Edmund Burke, British scholar, statesman, and champion of the American cause in the time of our revolution, joined philosophically with Washington and Jefferson in recognizing that every civilization depends on a public morality derived from a spiritual order which is higher than the state.

And despite the efforts of those sincere but misguided men and women who exclude God from public education in America, who would ask children and teachers to pretend while they are in school that there is no God and that the great religious truths can have no impact upon the life of the school --- despite the victories these anti-religionists may have scored in the courts of this Nation --- including the highest court --- I would maintain that the public schools in America today are nevertheless essential instruments of the Judeo-Christian system of ethics and values, inescapably derived from our spiritual history. Values are not preached or prescribed within school and college classrooms, it is true; but values are taught there or better, learned there, and values are enacted there. And these actions are far more effective than would be any effort to impose a set of state-established "right" values on the students' minds and spirits.

The true measure of all education must be the extent to which its benefits are conferred on all individuals, efficiently and effectively and indiscriminately. Failing that, education not only cannot teach morality, but itself becomes immoral.

But if by morality we mean man in the service of man as well as in the service of God, then the schools are deeply and inspiringly moral, and America is a far more moral Nation today than ever before in our history because of the work done in our schools by generations of dedicated and selfless men and women who have chosen to give their time, their talents, and their lives to the service of young people, even as exemplified in the lives and works of you who graduate today.

Our schools are transmitting learning to our children --- and that is a moral and spiritual action as well as a professional act of art and science. But in the rapid process of change that has taken place within the last decade or so, our schools have taken on a very important, nontraditional, and also highly moral role --- actively fulfilling as social instruments America's historic pledge that finally, all the citizens of this Nation shall be free have an equal chance for the intellectual and material opportunities that our society promises. It was Christ who said to his followers on that last night - "The truth shall make you free."

The schools, in short, are no longer content to function as sorting devices, sending middle-class youngsters on to good fortune, while denying the same prospect to poor youngsters, or black youngsters, or Puerto Rican or Mexican-American.

Moreover, the schools today are working intensely to shed dehumanizing institutionalism, reaching out humanely to childrens' families, whatever their backgrounds and whatever their personal failings and handicaps, with selflessness and sensitivity. Our

purpose must not be to prove to a child that he cannot succeed, but that he can succeed. Our conviction must be that no circumstance of birth --- whether place or race or wealth or lack of it --- can be allowed to damage permanently a young life. This is Christianity in practice.

And the schools are finally recognizing that their obligation to the student does not stop the day he graduates or --- as is sadly too often the case --- the day he drops out. As educators we are finding a new sense of a moral obligation to make certain that education means something in the context of a child's personal life and prospects as well as in the abstract pedagogical sense. Education that anticipates and permits such a condition is truly immoral and entirely unworthy of our 200-year-old assertions about equal opportunity for all in this land.

A preeminent purpose in education today --- public and nonpublic alike --- must be to teach each individual the highest value of all --- concern for others, compassion, some may call it love. That sense of personal worth deriving from selflessness and responsibility toward our fellow man is perhaps the mark of a maturing society. It is being strengthened and made real through an educational process that recognizes individual differences, merits, aptitudes, and talents, and that builds upon the personal characteristics of each student, and I believe the mark of today's college graduate is his greatly enlarged concern for others, over the self-centered and materialistic spirit of your counterparts a generation ago. You have experienced, I believe, that kind of education here at Atlantic Palm Beach College

and thus I am as confident of the contribution you will make to the moral and intellectual strength of America as any group of young men and women that I am likely to encounter in this or any other commencement season.

I would add a special word of welcome to those of you who are planning on joining me and my colleagues in the ranks of educators. As a teacher you will join in what I call the apostolic succession of the lay value system --- one of the strongest links in the historic chain connecting contemporary man with his moral antecedents. As a teacher you will transmit and preserve our moral principles and ethical values by your every word and action, not preaching, but behaving as examples --- not piously, but in unselfconscious expression of civilizing values. For outside of clergy and parents you will be esteemed and emulated by the young as no other individual -- surely one of the strongest attractions to the life of the educator and one of the most solemn responsibilities.

Yes, you are marching on a swiftly changing trail. There is no doubting that --- more of you, perhaps most of you, because of your experience here, will be marching uphill. There will be times when you need to pause in the rough going and hold fast to a firm and enduring and dependable rock. I believe you possess that rock.

I am not offended by those who are part of the Jesus Movement. They are young people who have suddenly found a rock in their turbulent lives, and in the discovery tell of the long march as though they had invented it.

You and I know the long march has been going on for 2000 years. It will go on for 2000 more, to be sure. You who leave Palm Beach Atlantic College today will be expected to do more than ordinary college graduates. I salute you, and pray that God marches with you, and you with him.

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